KOREA

focus

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Korean Backdrop

For five months now Korea has been the focus of world attention; yet to many of us the country is still an "unknown," or nearly so. True, as a result of the war, we have come to know where it is; we have some idea of its size and physical circumstances; we have gained a nodding acquaintance with such place names as Pusan, Taegu, Inchon, and Seoul; we have been told about the plumbing, or lack of it, the narrow winding streets swarming with goatee-bearded patriarchs, chunky women, many with babies slung on their backs, and vendors of unwanted trifles; and we have seen pictures of the patchwork-quilted countrysides, seamed with irrigation ditches and spattered with tumble-down hamlets.

Such knowledge is all to the good, but we may well question whether it brings us near enough to the true Korea to be an adequate backdrop against which to view the contemporary scene.

The truth of the matter is that Korea, for all her smallness (about a third of the size of Texas), abounds in physical diversity. And it is from this same diversity that she must draw her strength if she is ever to take her true place among the nations of the world.

Some indications of this diversity can be gathered from an examination of the accompanying maps. Take, for instance, the physiographic diagram, which makes an attempt to show both relative height and relative hilliness of the country. At first sight, it might look as though the whole peninsula were nothing but a tangle of hills and valleys, or, to use the vivid figure of speech adopted by the early French fathers—the first Europeans to view the land—"a sea lashed by a heavy gale." But if you look further, you will become aware of some well-marked differences, notably between the eastern and western parts of the country. The eastern half has a great deal more rough land than the western; it has several high mountain ranges, many deeply entrenched valleys, few large areas of lowland and practically no coastal plain. The western has most of the large rivers, including the Taedong, the Han, and the Kum, and a virtual monopoly of the richer alluvial lands. Altogether, so the experts will tell you, there are no fewer than nine major physical components to the peninsula, each of them with its own "personality."

Quite as notable are the climatic contrasts between the various parts of the peninsula. The extreme north has a long, cold winter, with five months below freezing; even the sea freezes hard inshore for about three months. In the south conditions are less severe, though the temperatures are low for the latitude: for example, at Pusan, at about the same latitude as Cape Hatteras, the average January temperature is the same as that for Long Island. In the summer temperatures are more nearly uniform, but whereas along the south coast the thermometer may rise above 80° F. any day from May to October, in the

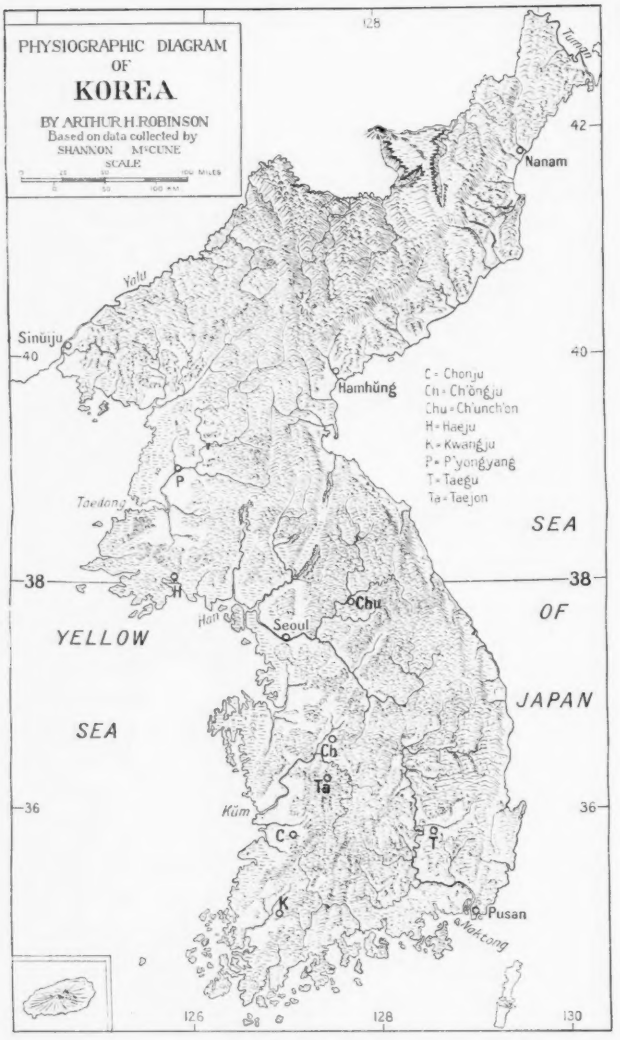

Figure 1

north such temperatures are rare except in June, July, and August. Similarly, the southerly (rain-bringing) monsoon lasts several weeks longer in the south than in the north. While it lasts, the average monthly rainfall is between 8 and 12 inches; the skies are seldom clear, and the roads are often deep in mud. Besides those between north and south, there are marked contrasts between east and west. In the summer the east coast is usually sheltered from the prevailing southerly winds and is therefore relatively fog-free: the more exposed south and west coasts, on the other hand, may be hidden from view days at a time during the height of the monsoon—to the embarrassment of the local fishermen and the peril of low-flying aircraft.

These differences of terrain and climate are reflected in the land use and population patterns. Rice and barley are the dominant grains in the south and west, and, with the help of the long summers and heavy rain, two crops a year can be obtained. In the north, the farmers have to be content with one crop; because of the shorter growing season and smaller rainfall, this is more often than not wheat, millet, corn, soybeans, or some other dry-field crop, though rice is grown in the better-favored places.

The population map (p. 3) reveals equally great regional differences. What could be sharper, for example, than the contrast between the southwestern and northeastern sections of the country? About 20 million people live south and west of a line from P'ongyang to Pusan; in density, this means a population of more than 600 to the square mile—phenomenal, even for the Orient. In the northeastern half there are considerably fewer than 10 million, which means that the density is here well below 200 to the square mile. (By way of comparison, the corresponding figure for Japan is roughly 540, and for the United States 50.)

But it is in the scattering of industrial raw materials and power that we find the most striking regional differences. Notice, in the first place, the extraordinary concentration around the town of P'yongyang: within a radius of 50 miles are located some of the most useful deposits of coal (lignite and anthracitic) and iron ore in the entire country. Away to the northeast, right up against the Manchurian border, is another highly mineralized area, containing what is thought to be a billion-ton reserve of iron ore; and, fortunately, fuel is available in abundance. In the north also are sizable gold, graphite, copper, and tungsten deposits, to say nothing of a hydro-power potential estimated to be well in excess of 2,000,000 kilowatts. The Yalu and Tuman Rivers (forming the boundary between Korea and Manchuria) are alone capable of generating nearly 2,000,000 kilowatts, though not all of this power would be available to Korea. The resources of southern sections of the peninsula are, by comparison, meager. The coal is mostly low grade anthracite and lignite, the hydro-power sites few and scattered; but the manganese, tungsten, and copper deposits are considerable and are likely to play an increasingly important industrial role.

Now let us notice how the 38th parallel stands in relation to these major contrasts. Although it would be an oversimplification to say that it cuts Korea into two halves, our three maps on page 3 would seem to suggest that the *dominant* physical and cultural conditions to the north of the line are very different from those to the south. Most of the forests are in the mountains of the north and east; most of the cleared land in the south and west. Most of the rice and barley lands are located in the

south; most of the millet, wheat, soybeans, and corn in the north. Most of the large concentrations of population, both rural and urban, are south of the line; to the north, settlement is mainly confined to the narrow, discontinuous coastal plains and mountain valleys. In 1944 the north produced 4 times as much coal, 300 times as much iron ore, and almost 23 times as much electric power as the south. Northern Korea also led overwhelmingly in the production of limestone and magnesite. The relative standing of the two parts in industrial production is indicated by the fact that in a recent year northern Korea handled 85 per cent of the country's mineral output, while the south produced nearly 90 per cent of the textiles and had most of the food processing plants.

As is only to be expected, such disparities between the economic productivity of the two halves of the country led, before 1945, to the development of a lively north-south interchange of goods.

To a remarkable degree, the products of north and south are complementary. The north needs rice and barley from the south for its factory workers. The south is in constant need of fertilizers for its paddy fields—fertilizers that could be supplied by chemical plants of the north when they are again in full operation. The north needs textiles, manganese, tungsten, and copper produced in the south; the south needs wood, coal, iron, machinery, and power from the north.

But commodity statistics, important as they are, do not indicate the full extent of the exchanges that developed between north and south. Equally important for Korean unity has been the growth, over the centuries, of a homogeneous population. Almost 100 per cent of the people living in the country come from the same ethnic stock and speak the same language—a figure that could barely be bettered by any other country. Admittedly, the "northerners" and the "southerners" are given to name calling, as they are, for that matter in the United States, and there have been occasions when the north and the south have each bid for the political supremacy of the whole country, but this has never prevented the people of the north from migrating to the south, or vice versa, nor has there been, until recently, any serious impediment to the flux of ideas up and down the peninsula.

In the light of such circumstances, is it surprising that the 38th parallel today lies astride all the main roads, railroads, and telegraph, telephone, and air-route systems of the country, or that it rides roughshod across the boundaries of no fewer than 3 provinces, 20 counties, and 31 districts? Or that the physical and cultural diversities

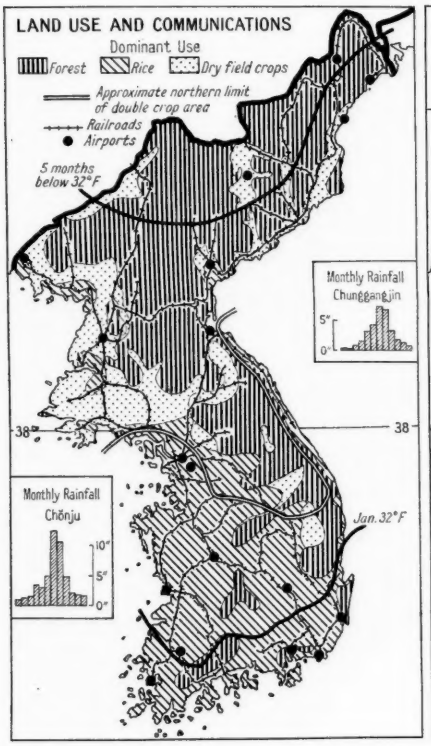

Figure 2

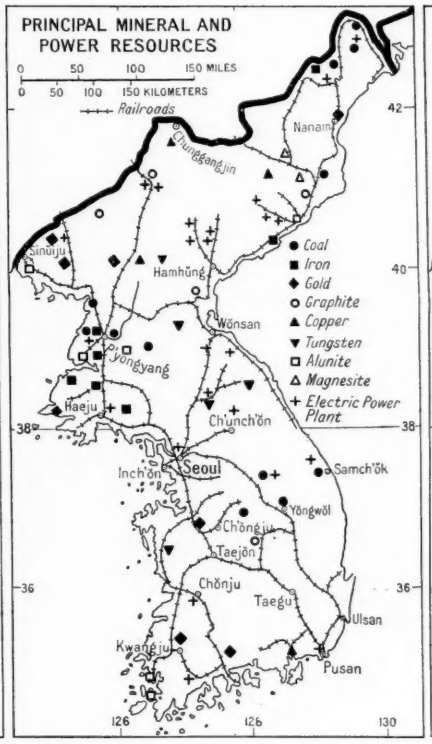

Figure 3

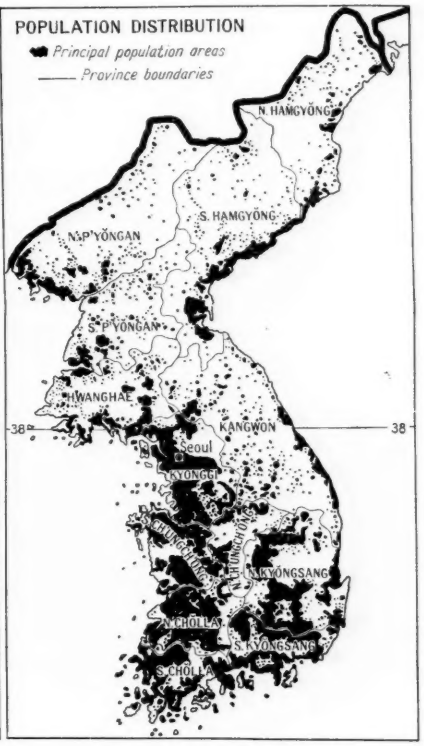

Figure 4